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ABSTRACT

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Faculty Participation in Voluntary Consortia

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FACULTY PARTICIPATION IN VOLUNTARY CONSORTIA

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INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

Two polar opposite trends, the rapid expansion of American higher education during the decade of the Sixties and its retrenchment during the Seventies, have stimulated the growth and development of cooperative efforts among colleges and universities. One form, the voluntary, multipurpose consortium, has emerged as a growing format and vehicle for interinstitutional cooperation. In the forty-year period between 1925 and 1965, nineteen consortia were founded in the United States.[1] In contrast, eighty-seven new consortia were formed during the ten-year period between 1965 and 1975.[2] It should be noted that although several consortia disbanded during this period, the trend in recent years has been distinctly in the direction of increased rates of consortium formation.

During the years of growth in higher education, consortia and other types of formal cooperative arrangements among colleges and universities tended to concentrate on the development of new academic programs and other expansionary activities in areas where individual institutions lacked the fiscal resources to institute these programs on their own. Examples of the types of programs initiated include overseas study centers, cooperative work-study programs, or off-campus centers. Fritz Grupe notes that external funding often was instrumental in the creation of these consortia and that

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these consortial arrangements flourished among similar types of institutions.[3] One exception to this trend of associations among like institutions were those consortia founded under the provisions of Title III of the Higher Education Act of 1976 (P.L. 89-329). This Act sought to stimulate the growth of "developing institutions" and their emergence into the mainstream of academic life by fostering cooperative linkages between well-established universities and small, "struggling to survive," teaching-oriented institutions.[4]

In contrast to the period of growth in higher education during the 1960's, the leveling-off during the 1970's seems to have marked a new era for consortium formation. Grupe notes that this phase is characterized by more heterogeneous groupings of colleges than the earlier periods.[5] He comments that many new consortia have been formed along geographical lines while mixing institutional types. In addition, Grupe observes that while outside funding is often sought, these newer consortia tend to rely more heavily on a pooling of their own institutional resources.[6] Recent legislative efforts at instituting external coordinating bodies have stimulated consortial growth as a means for seeking cooperative responses to issues regarding program articulation, resource allocation and other federal and state priorities.

Against this backdrop of the evolution and growth of voluntary consortia have been several assessments of the degree of success of consortia in performing these varied missions. Franklin Patterson states that ". . . neither of the two principal doctrines or ideological impulses that inform the consortium movement is yet fully fulfilled. . . ."[7] He continues:

> The first of these doctrines is that through cooperation the academic programs available to students can be substantially enriched and made more diverse. This doctrine is realized only on a modest scale even among the best consortia, and it would not be accurate to say that enrichment of academic programs has yet been generally achieved by the consortium movement.[8]

The second area, that of economic gains through cooperation, "turns out," in Patterson's words, "to be even more a matter of shadow than substance."[9]

One of the most complex problems facing consortia, and one which most consortia appear to skirt in their early organizational stages, is the issue of institutional autonomy and its historical impact on the ways in which colleges and universities function. A major component of institutional autonomy is the freedom of faculty within their respective disciplines, and the organization of departments and divisions within the institution which reflect these disciplinary orientations and structure the spheres of faculty interest and influence. Thus, many faculty members see cooperative activities as a drain on their own resources and as an unwarranted interference with their own priorities.[10]

As a result of these perceptions and the prevailing institutional reward system, faculty inputs to consortium planning and participation in consortium activities has been noticeably lacking. William M. Heston, Executive Director of the Long Island Regional Advisory Council on Higher Education, summarizes these observations:

> For the most part, successful consortia to date have gravitated more toward supportive activities than concentrating at the heart of the academic enterprise. Perhaps it is still too early . . . to pass judgment on their [consortia] prospects for future success, but some system of recognition and reward for faculty participation in cooperative interinstitutional activities will have to be developed to sustain any long-term faculty commitment to such activities, given the past history and nature of higher education.[11]

Heston's description of the status of faculty involvement in consortia is based on his own experience as a consortium director and on his interactions with others in like positions. However, this investigator could find no evidence of systematically collected empirical data on faculty

participation in consortia, nor any studies whose specific goal was to investigate the incentives and rewards which show a positive relationship to the inducement of faculty participation in consortia. It was the aim of the study on which I am reporting to describe the overall status of faculty participation in consortia and to discover the relationships, if any, that exist between institutional rewards and faculty participation.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to determine the extent to which college and university faculty are involved in the activities and programs of voluntary higher education consortia and to analyze the incentives and rewards offered to faculty in order to induce their participation. The first part of this study was concerned with a description of the types of activities in which faculty are involved, an estimate of the numbers of faculty who participate in each activity, the frequency of their participation in and the level of their commitment to consortium programs. The study also attempted to identify several systematic relationships between the attributes of consortia and the level of faculty participation. Due to the time limitations imposed by the nature of this forum, these results will not be discussed. The second part of my discussion will present an analysis of the incentives and rewards offered to faculty by consortia and by individual colleges and universities and the impact of those incentives on faculty participation and involvement in consortium programs.

Scope of the Study

The study concentrated on a specific subset of the 106 consortia listed in the 1975 edition of the Consortium Directory.[12] Seventy-four consortia were identified which conduct cooperative academic programs

designed to serve multiple purposes or to affect a general and wide-ranging audience within member institutions. Thirty-two consortia, out of the population of 106, were eliminated from the study based on the following criteria:

1. The consortium exists to serve only one or more specific purposes or to provide specific services, the provision of which are its only reason for existence.

2. The consortium exists only to provide programs or services other than academic (e.g., joint purchasing, computer operations, admissions, etc.).

3. The consortium serves as an administrative clearinghouse for member institutions, rather than as an independent organization which sponsors its own programs or activities.

4. The consortium is located outside the continental United States.

All 106 consortia, including the seventy-four in the sample under study, share the following characteristics which constitute the basis for inclusion in the Consortium Directory.[13] Each consortium:

1. is a voluntary formal organization;

2. has three or more member institutions;

3. has multiple academic programs;

4. is administered by at least one full-time professional;

5. has a required annual contribution or other tangible evidence of long-term commitment by member institutions.

Despite the appearance of precision in the definition above, consortia tend to be quite diverse in their structures, functions, governance and goals. Although many of them exhibit common characteristics, there are many attributes unique to each.

Research Methods and Results

Data for the first part of the study was collected by means of a survey questionnaire mailed to the directors of the seventy-four consortia

in the sample. The survey sought to develop a base of information on consortium characteristics and goals, policies and faculty participation. Respondents were asked to estimate the numbers of faculty who participated in each of eighteen activities common to most consortia. Space was allowed for write-ins of additional activities and estimates of participation. Mail and telephone follow-up requests yielded a return of 62 out of 74 surveys, an 83 percent return rate. Fifty-five returns were usable, and the study is based on analysis of these fifty-five returns.

The major intent of the survey was to gather information on faculty participation in consortia in order to document 1) the specific activities in which faculty are engaged and 2) an estimate of the numbers of faculty involved in each activity on a consortium-by-consortium basis. The survey tabulations tend to confirm the observations of persons familiar with the operations of most consortia: faculty are not active to any great extent. For all eighteen activities listed in the survey, a majority respondents indicated that fifty or fewer faculty members were involved. Also of note are the large number of respondents who indicated that particular activities were not applicable to their consortium. The accompanying table summarizes these results.

So far, the results I am reporting confirm what was obvious to knowledgeable observers of consortia, namely that large numbers of faculty do not participate in consortium activities. Several findings did emerge which were not susceptible to detection without the systematic collection of data. First, the study sought to determine the extent of participation in specific activities. Second, the study sought to relate faculty participation to consortium goals. The data indicate that faculty tend to be relatively more involved in those activities which have the most direct bearing on academic matters. For example, faculty were reported to be most

FACULTY PARTICIPATION IN CONSORTIUM ACTIVITIES
GROUPED FREQUENCY DISTRIBUTION

Activity	No. of Respondents	Number of Faculty 0-50 N	%	51-100 N	%	101-200 N	%	201-500 N	%	500+ N	%	Not Applicable N
1. Consortium governance	30	(91)		1	(3)	1	(3)	1	(3)	0	(0)	21
2. Consortium management	26	(100)		0	(0)	0	(0)	0	(0)	0	(0)	28
3. Long-range planning	26	(90)		3	(10)	0	(0)	9	(0)	0	(0)	25
4. Course lists and scheduling	22	(81)		2	(7)	2	(7)	0	(0)	1	(4)	27
5. Exchange of program information	21	(60)		7	(20)	4	(11)	0	(0)	3	(9)	19
6. Joint departmental activities	29	(76)		4	(11)	2	(5)	1	(3)	2	(5)	16
7. Development of joint academic programs	35	(85)		2	(5)	3	(7)	1	(2)	0	(0)	13
8. Cross registration of students	16	(55)		5	(17)	4	(14)	3	(10)	1	(3)	25
9. Faculty exchange within consortium	32	(97)		1	(3)	0	(0)	0	(0)	0	(0)	21
10. Travel and study programs	23	(96)		0	(0)	1	(4)	0	(0)	0	(0)	30
11. Interim term activities	21	(95)		0	(0)	1	(5)	0	(0)	0	(0)	32

Continued

Activity	No. of Respondents	Number of Faculty 0-50 N	%	51-100 N	%	101-200 N	%	201-500 N	%	500+ N	%	Not Applicable N
12. Faculty development programs		26	(74)	3	(9)	1	(3)	5	(14)	0	(0)	19
13. Teaching on more than one campus		26	(93)	2	(7)	0	(0)	0	(0)	0	(0)	26
14. Team-teaching		26	(96)	0	(0)	0	(0)	0	(0)	1	(4)	27
15. Actual use of academic resources of other institutions		22	(67)	3	(9)	2	(6)	5	(15)	1	(3)	21
16. Actual use of physical facilities of other institutions		17	(71)	1	(4)	3	(13)	2	(8)	1	(4)	30
17. Cooperative fund raising or proposal development		28	(80)	4	(11)	2	(6)	1	(3)	0	(0)	19
18. Community and public service through consortium programs		18	(82)	3	(14)	0	(0)	1	(5)	0	(0)	32

involved in the exchange of program information, development of joint academic programs and use of academic facilities on other campuses. These activities provide potential mechanisms of support for some of the more popular consortium goals, as determined from the survey responses: improvement of educational quality, achievement of economies, and more efficient use of resources. Faculty participation, on the other hand, may prove to be irrelevant to the accomplishment of objectives such as influencing higher education policy-making or saving institutions from economic demise.

While the first part of the study, accomplished by means of the questionnaire, established a base of empirical data on faculty participation, the second part of the study, using field techniques, provides insights into the nature of faculty participation, faculty perceptions of consortia, and the incentives and disincentives to participation. I will concentrate on these latter variables in the remainder of this presentation because they appear to this speaker, to relate to the much broader subject of faculty effort in areas other than traditional campus-based teaching, research and service.

The second part of the study sought, by means of field visits and interviews, to discover the reasons why faculty do or do not participate in consortia. An analysis of the incentives and disincentives to faculty participation was performed and is summarized here. A good deal of attention was given to the disincentives to participation which are perceived by faculty to exist. The removal of these disincentives was deemed to be a necessary condition for involvement of greater numbers of faculty in consortium activities. The findings are somewhat startling, since they suggest that general, organizational factors are as important in shaping

faculty attitudes about participation as are specific incentives and rewards.

Disincentives to Participation

Many factors were found to work against faculty participation in consortium activities. These factors tended to be organizationally-related and contextual in nature such as leadership, morale or particular policies. Perhaps the most fruitful place to begin this recap is to remind the listener of the general perception, mentioned at the outset, that consortia are basically administrative organizations, created by and for administrators. These perceptions were held by faculty and administrators on the campuses visited. The principal factor which shapes these perceptions of administrative dominance is the general pattern of consortium governance which places the institutional presidents in control of the consortium governing board. At the consortia visited the institutional presidents who were interviewed made it clear that they held their institutional priorities primary and that consortium needs were clearly subordinate.

Several problems arise out of the governance structure of most consortia with regard to perceptions of consortia which are shared widely by faculty. First, faculty sense a reluctance of campus chief executives to grant the consortium true autonomy and freedom of action. Second, although a good deal of a consortium's identity tends to be shaped by the decisions of its college presidents, those presidential commitments do not appear to filter down to faculty and, very frequently, to other senior administrators. Discontinuities were found to exist between the ideas and policies of chief executives who sit on the con-

sortium governing board and their implementation on the home campus. These discontinuities were perceived by faculty and others to convey a sense that the member institutions lacked meaningful commitments to interinstitutional cooperation; that the words of cooperation were not really meant to apply to faculty at each institution. Perhaps greater involvement of academic administrators, such as academic vice presidents and deans, would help the translation of policy from the level of the governing board to those at the lower echelons represented by faculty. At least on the surface, this would make for a more direct delegation of authority and a clear mandate for the support of new actions by faculty.

It appears that the most appropriate place to begin efforts at overcoming these disincentives to participation is at the department or discipline level. A number of respondents indicated that department chairpersons would be the most appropriate choice for leadership in cooperative activities since they are in a better position than executive officers to employ incentives which would evoke responses to faculty needs. The role of department chairpersons is important, too, because effective leadership and communications abilities are necessary to establishing contacts among the faculties of member institutions. Communication among departments across institutional lines provides a means for developing interinstitutional linkages of the sort that are lacking when cooperation among presidents does not provide their subordinates with clear directions for meaningful cooperation at lower levels.

I have attempted to portray these general conditions because, as a context, they create a less than perfect atmosphere for interinstitutional

cooperation by faculty. Only by keeping these conditions in mind, can the effectiveness of specific incentives and rewards be assessed. In most cases, faculty lack tangible incentives to cooperate. Coupled with an atmosphere that stifles cooperation, consortium staff members must daily wage a battle against overwhelming odds.

One tangible factor which accounts, in part, for a lack of faculty participation is the lack of specific recognition of that involvement as legitimate workload. Departments were found to be quite stingy in their granting of released time and pecuniary compensation to faculty engaged in consortium programs. One exception worth noting is faculty cooperation on sponsored research, where released or compensated time usually is a stipulation of the grant or contract.

Another tangible factor, found to be lacking in most cases, was a perception that interinstitutional cooperation among departments would lead to mutual benefits for all participants. At the departmental level, most faculty seem to take the attitude that solutions to common problems cannot be found through cooperation. These perceptions were structured, in part, by institutional policies which address problems or allocate resources internally first; only then addressing consortium issues or resource allocation as residuals. For example, popular courses are repeated continuously on one campus to meet student demands, leaving little time or manpower to address the service needs of other departments or institutions. It was found that the academic areas most interested in faculty exchanges or joint program development tended to have more time available due to low enrollments. Departments facing high student instructional demand

tended to seek additional faculty positions or dollars internally, rather than turn to sister institutions in the consortium for help.

In contrast, a number of departments indicated that they had pursued faculty exchanges and the development of joint programs in areas of relatively low student demand. Faculty members tended to view these activities as an outlet for heretofore untapped teaching interests as well as a reassertion of the value of the services of individual faculty. Departments viewed the development of new programs, even in conjunction with other institutions, as a way to stimulate additional student demand, reach new student clienteles, or develop areas which no department could support by itself. The most successful joint efforts tended to be in areas which no single department or institution was equipped to handle. For example, one consortium initiated a program in Social Welfare which was sponsored by three institutions. Students would take one-third of the course-work required for the major at each of the institutions involved. The addition of the undergraduate program in Social Welfare had demonstrable benefits for all three institutions while holding down the funding required from each.

Clearly, the strongest incentive for faculty cooperation at the departmental level is in the area of planning and implementing new programs. The attraction of faculty and other resources from member institutions offers the possibility of attracting new students and of using faculty talents that might otherwise become superfluous. Tenure becomes a factor here which may inhibit the internal reallocation of resources by institutions. These conditions make it extremely

difficult for institutions to avoid duplication of their academic offerings. The possibility of drawing faculty into cooperative programs sponsored by consortium institutions offers one way in to institute new programs during a time of limited resource additions.

External grant support, often channelled through the consortium rather than individual members provides a powerful inducement to faculty participation. This occurs in two ways. First, consortia attempt to involve faculty in proposal writing and other activities geared toward securing external funds as well as the actual research or service required to fulfill grant and contractual obligations. Second, the ability of consortia to secure external funds, for research, service and development, helps to establish their credibility with faculty. By fostering positive faculty attitudes, consortia can begin to move in the direction of inducing greater levels of faculty interest and participation.

The most powerful incentive to faculty was found to be the explicit recognition by departments of their service. Although recognition of service may provide tangible rewards in the form of salary increments, promotions and other perquisites, it performs an intangible function as well. The explicit recognition of consortium activity by means of departmental policy creates a climate where faculty are motivated to pursue these areas of interinstitutional cooperation. Specific payments for travel, honoraria or special one-time awards are useful to stimulate interest, build morale or otherwise promote cooperative programs. It is only through institutional policy, as applied at the college or department level, that the necessary and sufficient inducements to faculty participation can be provided.

The importance of institutional policy and its application as the primary source of inducements for faculty cannot be overstated. Yet, from the perspective of the consortium director and other personnel, influence seems to travel only in one direction. Evidence has been presented, or literature cited, which indicates the influence of institutional representatives on consortium governance and policy formation. Yet, these same institutional leaders are inconsistent in their attention to consortium policies in the discharge of their duties on their home campus. Consortium directors appear to have available only their persuasive powers and entrepreneurial abilities with which to attempt solutions to this problem. Additional research is required to evaluate the personal and organizational factors which influence the success or failure of directors to exert influence on constituent institutions.

In the final analysis, it seems that the locus of the reward is more important than the actual nature of the reward. By locus of the reward is meant the place in which it originates and is applied. The comparison of tangible and intangible rewards or economic and noneconomic rewards is dependent on the context of the organization and the motivations of individual faculty. For example, for some faculty members recognition of outstanding service to the department may provide a greater incentive than a promotion. For others, salary or job security may be the dominant motive. Therefore, rewards are both contingent on individual motives and on the organizational context.

In conclusion, I would like to add several comments on and recommendations regarding faculty involvement in consortia. First, it

was surprising to note the large number of faculty who expressed the opinion that interinstitutional cooperation, via the consortium approach, was merely an administrative ploy rather than a sincere commitment. I have outlined several of the reasons for this perception and hope that institutional administrators will see the need to back up their commitments with concrete actions. I was also surprised to find that faculty participation occurs somewhat independent of specific rewards, but rather in response to an overall context. This finding becomes very important, especially in light of the negative factors discussed previously.

Finally, I'd like to point out that a good deal of interinstitutional cooperation occurs independent of the formal consortium structure. This cooperation may be a good deal more issue-specific than consortium programs, but it supports the contention that faculty can and do cooperate given the proper conditions. I would suggest that consortia attempt to maximize these sorts of contact by acting as a broker among parties, rather than by attempting to develop and administer a wide range of programs. By minimizing the presence of the consortium as an actor and maximizing the roles of faculty and other campus-based actors, interinstitutional cooperation through consortia may begin to impact positively on the academic programs of member institutions.